

## Criminal Investigation and Threat/Risk Assessment in Law Enforcement

A woman is murdered by a stalker as she walks to her car after work. In the suburbs, a man kills his wife and then turns the gun on himself. Police are called to a hospital to investigate possible child abuse, but upon arrival the officers find the child has already died from the injuries. Police respond to a residence that has become a regular for domestic disputes, but this time the husband pulls out a knife and kills one of the responding officers. Each of these events raises the same question: Could this tragedy have been prevented?

The terms "threat assessment" and "risk assessment" are often used by criminal justice and mental health professionals to describe the investigative and analytical process that seeks to identify and manage high-risk offenders early on, to prevent progressive violence.

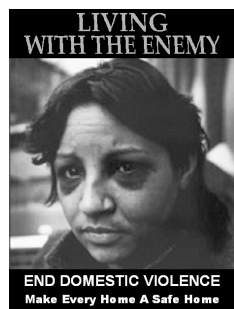
"Threat" assessment describes when a suspect makes a threatening statement (or written), then it is evaluated for the threat. If a direct threat hasn't been made, but there are other indicators warning of violence, the assessment would be looking at "risk" level.

Both threat and risk assessments begin by identifying the factors that indicate someone may be likely to commit a violent crime. Universities and government agencies, like the National Institute of Justice, most commonly conduct assessment studies that result in statistical measures or indicators of risk.

Threat and risk assessments act as warnings or training tools to alert

police officers to dangers, as well as investigative leads for police to follow-up on. When police document these factors, it also helps prosecutors and judges assess the likelihood that a subject is moving in the direction of violence.

Here are questions – related to domestic violence, stalking, and child abuse – that police should try to answer for their incident reports:



### Domestic Assault Threat/ Risk Assessment

Approximately 4 million American women experience a serious assault by an intimate partner during an average 12-month period.

*American Psychological Assn.*

***Has the woman experienced other "recent violence" at the hands of her partner?***

An NIJ study found that "no matter how severe" the most recent incident of abuse, if it happened recently the woman faces a higher risk. Half the women killed had experienced violence within 30 days of the homicide, some within 1 or 2 days. Increasingly frequent episodes of violence by a partner pose a higher risk of deadly violence, and should act as red flag to police. This includes the suspect forcing sex with the victim.

***Has the abuser started to use "violence outside the relationship"?***

There is also an increased risk of lethal assault when the abuser begins to act without regard to the legal or social consequences that previously constrained his violence. This may indicate a dangerous don't care attitude and/or self-destructiveness. The fact that the abuser used to care about the consequences of his actions in outside relationships, but no longer does, shows that he might have given up and plans to take his violence to the next level. This includes when the suspect threatens suicide (in cases where the suspect carries through on this threat, he will often kill the victim first and then himself!) Knowing if the abuser has a history of violence "outside" the relationship is important, but the investigating officer also needs to know what is changing "inside" the relationship. Also, police should try to ascertain if the suspect has a "pattern" for his violent acts; i.e., does he use some form of intimidation prior to assaulting someone? This may help with the assessment.

***Has there ever been "serious injury" in the past?***

Almost half the abused women in the NIJ study had experienced at least one "severe or life threatening" incident (often in the past year). Police should inquire as to any previous injuries, especially any injury that is permanent, being severely "beaten up," strangled, burned, internal injury, head injury, or broken bones. In 70 to 80 percent of intimate partner homicides, the

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man had seriously injured the woman in previous incidents.

***Has there ever been “serious threats” in the past?***

The Danger Assessment study found that women whose partners “threatened” them with murder were 15 times more likely than other women to be killed. Women who had been threatened with a gun were 20 times more likely than other women to be murdered. The suspect’s threats often involve accusing the victim of cheating.

***Has the woman ever “sought help” in the past?***

Abused women who were killed were much more likely to have sought help in the past. Police should be aware that, by seeking help, an abused woman indicates that her situation could be serious. High-risk women were much more likely to seek medical help or contact the police than seek counseling or go to a service agency. **IMPORTANT:** The risk of violence is highest when a victim of domestic abuse tries to separate or leave the relationship, or has just gotten a personal protection order (PPO).

***Is the woman currently “pregnant”?***

There is a very high risk if the victim is pregnant. For varied reasons, the suspect abuser is usually much more violent during this time.

***Does the male perpetrator “abuse alcohol” or other drugs?***

Researchers have found that “increased” substance use results in more severe violence; male perpetrators were more often problem drinkers, but female victims were “less” likely to use alcohol.

***Is the male perpetrator “violent toward children or animals”?***

There is increased risk when the suspect male is violent toward the children – this is part of their pattern of rage, or is a tactic for controlling the mother. The suspect may also injure or kill pets as a tactic for controlling the mother and children.

***Has the woman ever “resorted to violence” to protect herself?***

The NIJ study found that abused women who eventually killed their

partners had experienced more and increasing violence, felt they had fewer resources to rely on, and were in a married relationship with children. Some women in an increasingly abusive relationship, feeling trapped with no where to turn, may resort to violence to protect themselves and their children. Women who confide to police these problems and feelings should be given top priority for help.

Prompt police and criminal justice intervention is essential to reduce domestic violence! Intimate partner homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American women aged 15 to 45, and the seventh leading cause of premature death for U.S. women overall. To intervene effectively with abused women, police need to identify and document risk factors.



## Stalking Threat/Risk Assessment

Because stalkers are dangerously unpredictable... never underestimate the potential threat that a stalker may pose.

**Tracy Bahm, Director  
Stalking Resource Center**

Threat assessment is crucial to controlling stalking.

**U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office  
of Community Oriented Policing  
Services**

Some stalkers may stop if they are appropriately warned. However, much stalking involves deliberately malicious behavior that police warnings and personal protection orders fail to deter. So what can victims and police do? While there is no single stalker profile, there are indicators. When the risk factors for violence pose a grave threat, victims urgently need a safety plan – carefully not allowing themselves to be in vulnerable positions and quickly reporting all direct and indirect threats to the police. Police need to make early assessments, and be ready to respond at a moment’s notice. Surveillance and other aggressive inves-

tigative techniques may be appropriate when possible. All community agencies that may be involved need to exchange information frequently in order to keep victims safe. And while there are limits within the law, vigorous prosecution of stalking cases can help prevent future violence.

***Was their “prior sexual intimacy” between the victim and the stalker?***

There are different types of stalkers. Some of the most dangerous cases are where a stranger or acquaintance has become dangerously delusional or obsessive. But in assessing the risk of violence poised by a stalker, an NIJ study found that prior sexual intimacy between the victim and the stalker greatly increased the danger. The study found that 64 percent of women who reported being raped, assaulted, or stalked since age 18 were victimized by a current, or former, husband, cohabitating partner, or boyfriend. In these cases, there will be many similarities to patterns in domestic violence.

Prior-intimate stalking victims report that they were physically assaulted 81 percent of the time and sexually assaulted 31 percent of the time. A National Femicide study on women who were murdered by former intimate partners, found that 76 percent of the victims had been stalked before being murdered.

Why is former intimacy such a red flag? Former intimate partners often stalk to exact revenge for the rejection they experienced when the relationship ended. For many of these stalkers, rejection leads to rage. Like domestic violence, victims felt they were being stalked because: The stalker wanted to control the victim; The stalker wanted to keep the victim in a relationship; The stalker wanted to scare the victim. Average duration of stalking reported was 1.8 years; however if stalking involved former intimate partners, average duration increased to 2.2 years.

***Does the stalker have a “prior criminal history” or “personality disorder”?***

Many of the most serious stalkers suffer from personality disorders but not necessarily from major mental disorders, which means they can be

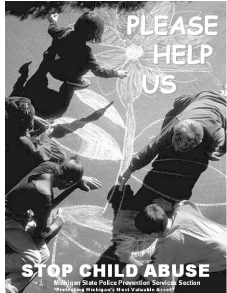
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dangerous but still very intelligent. Such stalkers are not easily deterred by the rule of law, and will often have prior encounters with police. One study indicated that between 39 percent and 66 percent of stalkers have prior criminal histories. Registered sex offenders, domestic violence, and violations of restraining orders are obvious warnings. But if police investigate unsolved offenses against the victim, they may find a wide variety of crimes that could relate to the stalking. Police should take a close look at cases of theft, vandalism, harassing phone calls, identity theft, cruelty to pets, voyeurism, and the list goes on. Also keep in mind that stalkers will often use anonymous or romantic gifts as tools to further terrorize the victim.

***Does the stalker have a “substance abuse” problem or chemical dependence?***

Like domestic assault, the danger is greatly increased when the perpetrator of stalking has a substance abuse problem.



**Child Abuse Threat/Risk Assessment**

“The murder rate for children younger than age 1 was higher than the rate for all youth ages 1–15.”

*September 2004, FBI Uniform Crime Report*

Child Protective Services are trained to assess the risk of child maltreatment, but they often rely on police to detect and refer cases. Many child abuse cases are part of the assessment for domestic violence. But police need to be very perceptive, because some child abuse cases are not readily obvious. Cases that involve infants can be especially difficult because of the child’s isolation from the public; these cases often rely on family or medical personnel to notify police. Police can help by paying attention and “documenting” some of these warning signs

that indicate an increased risk of child abuse and neglect:

**THE PARENTS:**

- Seem to be having economic, housing or personal problems
- Are isolated from their family or community
- Have difficulty controlling anger or stress
- Are dealing with physical or mental health issues
- Abuse alcohol or drugs
- Appear uninterested in the care, nourishment or safety of their children
- Deny responsibility for their actions
- Blame their victims
- Do the opposite of what they advocate
- Need to dominate their children
- Deeply mistrust their children
- Obsess about their own needs, not their children’s needs
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of their own emotional needs
- Repeats abusive acts compulsively (maybe right in front of the officer if he or she watches long enough).

**THE CHILD:**

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance.
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents’ attention.
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Lacks adult supervision.
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn.
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home.

**SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE**

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **child**:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes.
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school.
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home.
- Shrinks at the approach of adults.
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child’s injury.
- Describes the child as “evil,” or in some other very negative way.
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child.
- Has a history of abuse as a child.

**SIGNS OF NEGLECT**

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **child**:

- Is frequently absent from school.
- Begs or steals food or money.
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses.
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor.
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs.
- States that there is no one at home to provide care.

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child.
- Seems apathetic or depressed.
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner.

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- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs.

#### SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **child**:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting.
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities.
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting.
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite.
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior.
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14.
- Runs away.
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex.
- Is secretive and isolated.
- Is jealous or controlling with family members.

#### SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL MALTREATMENT

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the **child**:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression.
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example).
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development.
- Has attempted suicide.
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent.

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child.
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems.
- Overtly rejects the child.

#### CONCLUSION

Threat and risk assessments for domestic violence, stalking, and child abuse, are attempts to calculate the probability of danger, knowing there is no certain approach to preventing violence. But research has shown that

risks of harm are much greater when certain factors come together. Police need to investigate and document these factors so they can prepare for rapid response, and so prosecutors and courts have the facts needed to protect victims from further harm.

*Sources: The National Institute of Justice; The National Center for Victims of Crime; and the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information.*

*For more information, contact the Michigan State Police Prevention Services Section, 517-333-4006, and the Michigan State Police Violent Crimes Unit, 517-336-6565.*

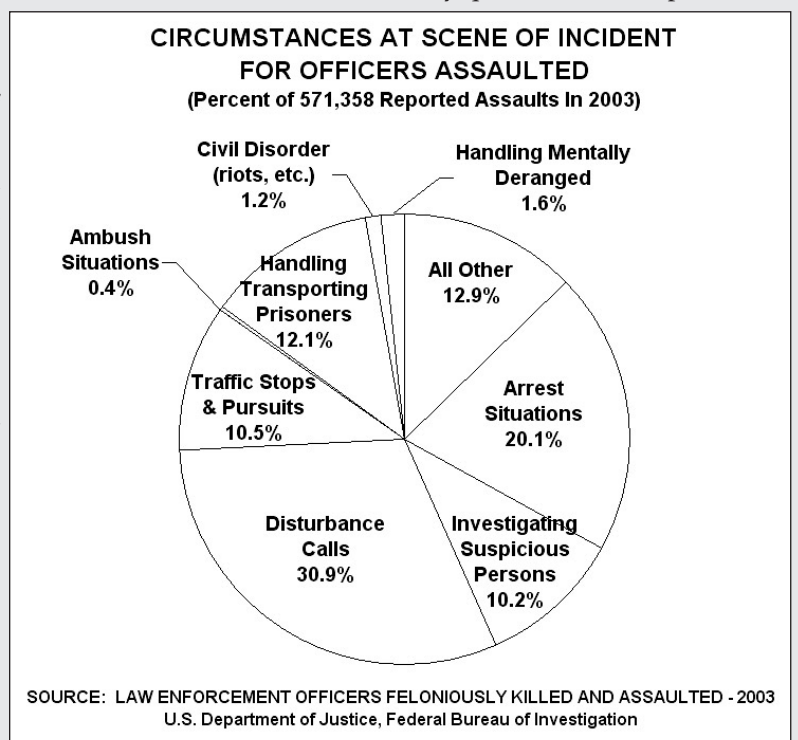
### Domestic/Disturbance Cases: Dangerous For Victims And Police

The FBI recently released accumulated statistics for *Crime in the United States*, and *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted in 2003*.

Included in the first study, *Violence Among Family Members and Intimate Partners*, and *The Importance of Homicide as a Community Problem in the United States*. These studies revealed that domestic relationships accounted for 53 percent of all violent incidents. Additionally, 44 percent of these violent incidents involved a child. Moreover, 70 percent of homicides reported to the FBI showed the victim and offender typically had some prior relationship.

2003 statistics for police officers killed or assaulted revealed that approximately 20 percent of officers feloniously killed in the line of duty were investigating a disturbance call, half of which were family quarrels. Over 30 percent

of officers assaulted in the line of duty were responding to a family quarrel or other disturbance call. This makes domestic quarrels and other disturbance cases one of the most dangerous for victims and police alike.



# Terrorist Attack in Beslan, Russia

On October 6, 2004, the U.S. Department of Education, with assistance from the FBI, presented a series of proposals regarding lessons learned from the tragic Beslan school incident of early September. In an effort to protect America's schools and students, the following information will be useful to update local crisis plans.

## SHORT-TERM PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Short-term protective measures include reviewing procedures to safeguard school facilities and students and others within them. Those recommendations include:

- a. Review all school emergency and crisis management plans. Helpful guidance can be found at [www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/](http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/).
- b. Raise awareness among local law enforcement officers and school officials by conducting exercises relating to school emergency and crisis management plans.
- c. Raise awareness among school officials and students by conducting awareness training relating to the school environment that includes awareness of signs of terrorism.
- d. Raise community awareness of any potential threats as well as vulnerabilities.
- e. Prepare the school staff to act in a crisis situation.
- f. Consider a closed-campus approach to limit visitors.
- g. Consider a single entry point for all attendees, staff and visitors.
- h. Focus patrols by law enforcement officers on and around school grounds.
- i. Ensure that school officials will always be able to contact school buses.
- j. Ensure that emergency communications from and to schools are working.
- k. Download the Red Cross brochure, *Terrorism: Preparing for the Unexpected*, at <http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/terrorism.pdf> and provide a copy to students, staff and faculty.



[//www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/terrorism.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/terrorism.pdf) and provide a copy to students, staff and faculty.

- l. Report any suspicious activity to law enforcement authorities.

## LONG-TERM PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Long-term protective measures should include physical enhancements to school buildings. Among the measures schools should consider are the following:

- a. Install secure locks for all external and internal doors and windows.
- b. Install window and external door protections with quick-release capability.
- c. Consider establishing a safe area (or safe areas) within the school for assembly and shelter during emergencies.
- d. Apply protective coating on windows in facilities that face traffic. That and other helpful information on school facilities can be found at [www.edfacilities.org/](http://www.edfacilities.org/).

## DANGER SIGNS

Based on the analysis, it is suggested that local law enforcement watch for certain activities that may suggest potential unwelcome surveillance of educational facilities. These indicators alone may in fact reflect legitimate activity not related to terrorism. Multiple indicators, however, could suggest a heightened terrorist or criminal threat. They are:

- a. Unusual interest in security, entry points, and access controls or barriers such as fences or walls;

- b. Interest in obtaining site plans for schools, bus routes, attendance lists and other information about a school, its employees or students;

- c. Unusual behavior such as staring at or quickly looking away from personnel or vehicles entering or leaving designated facilities or parking areas;

- d. Observation of security reaction drills or procedures;

- e. Increase in anonymous telephone or e-mail threats to facilities in conjunction with suspected surveillance incidents;

- f. Foot surveillance involving individuals working together;

- g. Mobile surveillance using bicycles, scooters, motorcycles, cars, trucks, sport utility vehicles, limousines, boats or small aircraft;

- h. Prolonged static surveillance using people disguised as panhandlers, shoe shiners, food, newspaper or flower vendors, or street sweepers not previously seen in the area;

- i. Discreet use of still cameras, video recorders, or note-taking at non-tourist locations;

- j. Use of multiple sets of clothing and identification or the use of sketching materials (paper, pencils, etc.);

- k. Questioning of security or facility personnel; and

- l. Unexplained presence of unauthorized persons in places where they should not be.

## CRISIS PLANNING

This information should be reviewed by a school's security staff, local law enforcement, and other first responders and emergency preparedness personnel, to ensure that these protective measures are included and implemented through a School Crisis Plan. Visit the Education Department's web site on crisis planning, [www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/](http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/), where additional information about key elements of a crisis plan can be found.



## IN HONOR OF ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT SERGEANT MARCUS YOUNG NAMED 2004 POLICE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Sergeant Marcus Young of the Ukiah, Calif., Police Department, has been named the 2004 Police Officer of the Year by PARADE magazine and the International Association of Chiefs of Police for his heroic actions in a deadly gun battle, which saved the lives of several people.

The highest honor in law enforcement was presented to Sgt. Young, 42, at a ceremony on Tuesday, November 16, in Los Angeles. Ten additional officers received honorable mention, in a tribute to all law enforcement.

On the night of March 7, 2003, Sgt. Marcus Young, volunteered to fill a patrol shift vacancy. On his shift, Young, accompanied by Julian Covella, a high school student and police cadet, then 17, was called to a local Wal-Mart to arrest a shoplifter. During the arrest, Young was approached by the shoplifter's boyfriend, Neal Beckman, 35, an ex-con and member of a violent white supremacist prison group.

Sgt. Young ordered Beckman to take his hands out of his pockets. Beckman admitted he had a knife in his left pocket, and as Sgt. Young seized the felon's arm to disarm him, Beckman drew a .38 caliber revolver from his right pocket and fired at point blank range, striking Young in the head, side, back and right arm, shattering the bone. Sgt. Young's left hand was also seriously injured. Young's body armor stopped two bullets to his chest and saved his life.

Just as Beckman prepared to fire again, store security guard Brett Schott tackled him, and succeeded in wresting the now-empty gun from his hand. Beckman then stabbed the security guard, nearly killing him, and began to search the patrol car, where Young kept his duty-issue rifle and shotgun. Unable to draw his sidearm, Young called for police cadet Julian Covella, to place the weapon in Young's left hand. Firing from a kneeling position,



*Sergeant Marcus Young  
Ukiah, California Police Department*

Sgt. Young fired four shots using his weak hand, scoring four hits, killing Beckman before he could harm anyone else. In fact, a later search of Beckman's vehicle uncovered a cache of five pipe bombs.

"I was on my knees in a parking space," Young recalls. "My right arm was paralyzed, my left hand had a two-inch tear between the index and middle fingers, and I could not draw my gun. I was bleeding profusely."

After help arrived, Young, Schott and Beckman were taken to the local hospital, where Beckman was pronounced dead. Schott recovered from his wounds, but Young continues to struggle with pain and weakness in his upper body. "I thought the entire time that I was going to die," Young says. "I told an officer to tell my wife I loved her, because I didn't think I would get to do it myself."

"I survived because of many years of ongoing training, the actions of two brave men, and because God was by my side," said Young. In his 17 years as a police officer, Sgt. Young has faced danger before, but he said, "I'm a police officer. This is what I do."



**Christopher Reeve, real-life  
Superman, 1952-2004.**

**Courage means  
never giving up.**



Suffering is not, by itself, courage... Courage is not the absence of fear... You get courage by loving something more than your own well-being. When you love virtue, when you love freedom, when you love other people, then you find the strength to demand courage of yourself.

— John McCain